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Blue-jay

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THE JEWEL OF JAFF JEWELL

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idea to send him up a sleeping powder, to be taken immediately after supper, in a third of a glass of water," Hod grinned toothlessly.

"Don't worry," snapped the Sheriff. "You won't be asked to take any chances. I'll find a full-sized man for the job—if there's one in the county."

"And after he's smoked out what's your program?"

"Shoot him down like a dog—unless he surrenders," answered Bates with Napoleonic grimness.

Hod pared himself a slice of tobacco. "Another easy thing, in the dead of night, with Jaff on the lops and working the triggers of fifty-seven varieties of man-killing inventions."

BUT Bates was not to be ridiculed out of his strategy, in spite of his own misgivings, and at midnight the execution of it began. Baled hay, chopped into portable sections and soaked with kerosene, was the tinder selected.

"Now, Men," said the Sheriff solemnly to the assembled deputies, "a word before you go back to your posts. This is war—and war is hell, as old Sherman said. I don't want you to think of the Jaff Jewell you've always known, or the Jaff of last Christmas, who touched our hearts with the gifts for imaginary people. Think of the fiend who in cold blood brained old man Search and his wife, and when he comes out, in the light of the fire, close up and shoot him down—unless he should be unarmed and making unmistakable signs of surrender."

It was repugnant work for men most of whom would have balked at drowning out a woodchuck; but each one dutifully shouldered his portion of hay, and the line, lighted only by the stars twinkling through the half-grown leaves above, wound noiselessly to a point within a hundred yards of their ultimate goal.

Dan Kelsey, the farmer's boy who had volunteered for the hazardous part of the program, continued up the hillside with his bundle of hay, in the direction of Jaff's fortress. The others waited with quickened hearts; for discovery unquestionably meant death for the youth. Kelsey, however, returned in safety—not once but again and again.

On his eighth or ninth trip, though, he was gone longer than usual, and presently there showed between the black boles of the trees a glow that quickly waxed into a leaping mass of flames. Bates ground out an imprecation between set teeth, and when Kelsey finally reappeared savagely demanded an explanation of the premature ignition.

"I didn't light it," answered the youth, breathing heavily. "Jaff done it, after pushin' the hay back from the wall."

"Did you see him?"

"Yes. When I got up there he was standin' back in the shoulder of a tree."

"Then why in the name of God didn't you shoot him?" bellowed the Sheriff.

Kelsey, with downcast eyes, was dumb for an interval. Then he answered with twitching lips, "Because—because he didn't shoot me when he had a chance to."

Bates glared at the delinquent for a moment, but spoke in a milder tone than was expected. "You are young, Dan—too young for man hunting. We'll excuse you from further service. The stuff is off, Men. Go to bed."

At eight o'clock the next morning the sudden barking of the hand-arms and the spilt detonations of the howitzer began again, silencing the sweet whistle of meadow larks, frightening the cardinals from thicket to thicket on flaming wings, and poisoning April's sylvan incense with the acrid fumes of burnt powder. The theory that the high velocity, 30's would riddle the cabin like a hatbox had long since been exploded; but it was still hoped that out of the swarm of steel-jacketed bullets there might be one that, in its chance-guided, incalculable deflections, would search out the body of Jaff Jewell.

ABOUT half-past eight Dan Kelsey, in a broad-brimmed hickory hat and top boots, entered the camp with an embarrassed air.

The Sheriff, opening a case of ammunition, paused with a brusk "Well?"

"Mr. Bates," began the youth shyly, "there was something else I had ought to have told you last night, but I didn't; dast for fear you wouldn't believe me. There was another reason why I didn't shoot Jaff. It—was because a woman was standin' beside him, holdin' his hand."

"A woman!" snorted Bates. "You've

made that story up, Dan, to let yourself down easy—or else you were seein' things."

"No, Sir," protested Kelsey stoutly. "I seen her as plain in the firelight as I see you now. She was a young woman, as pretty as a picture, dressed in a low-cut gown, with a string of pearls around her neck and a kind of a crown on her head. And she was laughin'! I couldn't sleep last night for thinkin' about that laugh, when it wou'd have been more natural for her to cry; and when the guns began to crack this morning I left my horses in the furrow to ride over here and tell you about her. I had to. 'Tain't right to fire on that house with an innocent woman in it."

"You saw the Queen of the May or some other fairy," answered the Sheriff mockingly. "Run back to your plow, Danny, take a pill on retiring tonight, and by morning you'll be yourself again."

Nevertheless his mind had leaped back to Christmas Eve and Jaff's Christmas box, and after Kelsey had gone he began to nibble his stubby red mustache. If there really was a woman in Jaff's cabin, it would make a mighty unpleasant newspaper story—for himself. He turned nervously at the snapping at a twig behind him.

"We've got him!" cried Cal Botsford. "At least he's out in front of his cabin waving a white handkerchief."

"Thank God!" exclaimed Bates fervently. He leaped to his feet, felt in his hip pocket to make sure of his bracelets, and started up the slope, with Botsford in his wake.

JAFF, standing in front of his battered castle, presented a pitiable sight. The 30's had evidently done considerable rummaging around inside. One bloody bandage encircled his head and another his right wrist; his left leg was tied round with a handkerchief above his knee; hands and face were as black as a miner's from powder stains, and hair and whiskers were singed.

"You can have the girl now—what's left of her," said he with simple pathos, a mere hint of tragedy.

Enigmatical as the words were to Cal Botsford, sudden sweat beaded the Sheriff's brow, and his hand came out of his pocket without the steel cuffs. Motioning Botsford to wait outside, he followed Jaff in.

The floor was ankle deep with plaster, broken glass, splinters, scraps of wall paper, and exploded shells. But what enchaind the Sheriff's eyes was a bed in the corner upon which a young woman lay, clothed much as Kelsey had described her. Her eyes were shut, her face deathly white, and one temple was crossed with a trickle of blood.

"Dead!" whispered Bates, from a dry throat.

"Dying," answered Jaff calmly.

Bates jumped to the door. "Doc Freeman—quick!" said he thickly to Botsford. "He's at Kamschulte's, dressing Bob's shoulder. Tell him it's a matter of life or death. But don't mention this gal yet—for there is a girl. And tell the boys," he added, at sight of the ingathering deputies, "to keep outside."

He turned back into the room. Jaff, occupying a chair from which one arm and half the back had been shot away, motioned him toward another one in scarcely better repair.

IHID her well for nigh onto twenty years," said Jaff, like a man resuming a story. "Her mother in Heaven will bless me for that. Only one man in this country ever seen her. That was the minister that buried her mother. I realized afterward it was a mistake to let him see her, and I corrected it by having him out here the next year to bury Ruby. Of course he didn't bury her; only a box with some stones in it."

"Yet I always felt it in my bones that some day this thing would come to pass. Secrets, you know, will always out in time; and I made up my mind, with God as my counselor, to kill her before I'd let anybody take her to a living death in a 'sylum. But that would have been a grievous hard thing for a father to do, and I'm glad to be spared the pain."

Bates was not a man of subtle intuitions; but it was dawning upon him that he had made a ghastly mistake. The thought set up a tremor in the big hairy hands which clasped his hat; but all he could do just then was to moisten his stiff lips and nod dully in recognition of Jaff's words.

"I don't feel resentful towards you," continued the little man in a soft, covert tone that wrenched the big man's guilty

heart. "The law required you to get her, and you're an officer of the law. The law got her once before, about a year after she'd fell down the cellar steps, which brought her trouble on. We'd ought to have kept her screened then, her mammy and me; but, not knowin' about the law, we let her play out with the other children, back there in West Virginny—and one day an officer come and took her away to the 'sylum."

"He said we was too poor to give her proper care. We was poor, Nanny and me, along of my drinkin'; but we fed our little Ruby more than the 'sylum people did. We kept her cleaner, and never skimmed her clothes in the wintertime, or made her sleep in a bed that was aise with vermin. When I found those things out, Mister, I could hear that child cryin' for her mammy in my dreams; and always bein' a hand to do what I thought was right, regardless of the cost, I stole her back one day when she was playin' in the 'sylum yard, and we lit out that night for the West."

"She's been a care. I've been her daddy and her mammy both. I've made all her clothes, and her doll clothes too. I've done the cooking and kept the house—and kept it right; though you wouldn't think so from the way it looks now. I've run the farm. In twenty years I've never spent a night from under this roof, or took a meal out till last Christmas time. I've bought books to study up on her case." He nodded toward a bullet-ridden shelf of books.

"But I don't count it a hardship, mind you. She's paid me back a hundredfold—something she mightn't have done if she'd been clothed in her right mind. She's drawn me closer to God. She saved me from liquor. I've never felt but once since her mammy died. That was last Christmas, when I was upset about her gifts not gettin' here; also worried because I thought the law was on our trail again."

"I built that high fence to keep her in when I was out in the fields; for like a mischievous child she was fond of running away. She got out last Saturday night for the first time. I missed her at daylight, and didn't find her till about eight o'clock. She was setting down by the creek, looking at the pictures in a newspaper. My heart jumped; for I knew she'd been to some house, and when I looked at the label on the paper I saw it come from Search's."

HE paused and passed his hand over his bandaged head, as if it ached. Bates mopped his brow and glanced at the motionless figure on the bed. It was she, then, whom the dogs had trailed! It was she who—but the grisly thought sickened him, and a profound pity for the hapless and unsuspecting father swept over him. Then Jaff's monologue began again.

"I was afeard somebody had seen her. I knew she'd attract attention; for she don't dress like the women around here. She always loved pretty clothes, and I always kept her in plenty. So I was on my guard, and when I seen you comin' with your dogs I knew it was her you wanted."

"Mister," the first break came in his voice, "if you had known her, you'd never have wanted to take her to the 'sylum. She'd fade in a 'sylum like a spring beauty tore up by the roots. She lived on sunshine and fresh air and flowers, just like a bee or a bird. The little she'd seemed skasny enough to keep her soul and body together. She wasn't like any other crazy person you ever saw. She never did any body or anything harm. I never knew her to mash a bug. She was always happy, laughing and singing all day long and kissing me a hundred times, and always bringin' in young things, like kittens and pups and lambs. I've known her to take off her clothes to swaddle a cold lamb. She was as pure as a drop of dew, as sweet as a rose, and she had the privileges of angels and goddesses and babes."

"Seems strange, Mister, to call a person like that crazy. Seems like she ought to be called a saint. Seems like, if we're children of our Heavenly Father, if at the ones who ain't innocent and who don't sing and laugh and play all day long, ought to be called the crazy ones."

Suddenly covering his face with his hands, he began to weep softly. Bates, hearing the trample of a horse, was glad of an excuse to step outside.

NEWs for you, Sheriff," said the physician crisply, removing the lavender, undressed kids in which he drove on the hottest summer day. "You've been barkin' up the wrong tree. Kamschulte's hired man is the murderer. He left last night at midnight. One of Kamschulte's boys, comin' home from sparking a girl, saw him and roused the house. They followed him, caught him, and found the gold certificates